

# The "Suggested Further Reading" in "Living for Pleasure"

Post by "Joshua" of January 22, 2026 at 8:24 PM

Quote

„The Swerve“ I haven't read yet. It is a little bit older or ? Is its content still interesting and has valid ideas/ views about Epicurean Philosophy ? Would you recommend it ? Maybe I would read it next.

I'm not very good about keeping up with the secondary literature, but *The Swerve* by Stephen Greenblatt was my main introduction to Epicureanism and I am always happy to write in his defense.

I first encountered Greenblatt's work as an under-graduate English/History major. He was (is?) the editor of the magisterial *Norton Anthology of English Literature* in many volumes, and this venerable anthology formed the backbone of the English Literature curriculum. This was a rather impersonal introduction, but we also read his biography of William Shakespeare (*Will in the World*), which a friend of mine thought was one of the better supplementary texts we studied that semester. So I graduated with at least a sense of Greenblatt's work, and recognized the name a few years later on the front of a paperback while I was looking for something new to read on my upcoming travels.

I have since listened many times to the audiobook narrated by Edoardo Ballerini (a great help with the pronunciation of the Italian names), and always with pleasure.

*The Swerve* does contain a chapter dedicated to an outline of Epicurean philosophy, which, though I might quibble here and there, I don't find at all objectionable. But that's not really what this book is about. It is a study of the loss, submergence, survival, and rediscovery of the literature, language, and culture of classical antiquity, as seen through the eyes of a group of Italian Humanists of the Quattrocento who were trying to save what was left of the ancient past.

It tells of the lives, livelihoods, rivalries, vanities, and ambitions of men like Poggio Bracciolini, Leonardo Bruni, Lorenzo Valla, Marsilio Ficino, Coluccio Salutati, Niccolò de' Niccoli, Pier Paolo Vergerio, and many others.

Since several of these figures were prominent and learned scribes of the Papal Curia at the Vatican, the book also dwells on the faith and politics of the 15th century, the executions of Giordano Bruno, Jerome of Prague, and Jan Hus; and the trial of Antipope John XXIII, the schism of the church, as well as the [Council of Constance](#) that brought many of these matters to a

head.

Since the common thread that runs through all of this is the rediscovery and recirculation of Lucretius' grand Epicurean poem, I certainly think Greenblatt's book is worth reading!